DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 110 865 CG 008 958

TITLE Action Counseling with Suspended Students.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 5p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Counseling Programs; Counselor Training; *Discipline Problems; *Family Counseling; *Group Counseling; Occupational Guidance; *Parent School Relationship; Program Descriptions; Secondary Education; Speeches; *Suspension
IDENTIFIERS *Cooperative Community Counseling

ABSTRACT

The Cooperative Community Counseling Project was designed to undertake an intensive joint individual and family counseling program to reduce maladaptive behaviors of students who were suspended from community high schools. Counselor training for this program included weekly seminars focusing on specific topics: (1) general problems associated with suspensions, (2) study of employment and educational opportunities for urban youth, (3) study of disciplinary practices in real school situations, (4) critique of counseling interviews and techniques, and (5) production of a documentary film about work with suspended students. The program consisted of individual and group counseling, academic assistance, occupational and educational guidance, teacher descriptions of student behavior, parent interviews and evaluation. Inventory and interview data on students' perceptions of the program indicated some differences between project and control groups. The results suggest that schools should make counseling-related activities a basic part of treatment procedures for suspended students. (GMF)

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ACTION COUNSELING WITH SUSPENDED STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

The Cooperative Community Counseling Project was designed to undertake an intensive joint individual and family counseling program to reduce maladaptive behavior of students who were suspended from two high schools in Peoria. Basic to the project was the belief that suspension from school is symptomatic of personal adjustment problems, family stress or environmental pressures. Suspension procedures as commonly employed were believed to have negative effects since they provided free time for maladjustive behavior, and absence from school compounded academic deficiencies. Basic also was the hypothesis that if student and parent counseling were offered, and stimulating activities provided during a suspension period, maladjustive behavior might be reduced.

The training of counselors and teachers-in-training to undertake the task of providing the counseling and related activities was a major concern of the project's directors. The counselors and future teachers were likely to take (and some have already taken) positions which would require them to contribute to community activities in urban situations.

The project, then, served the purpose of preparing persons to work in urban settings, attempted to serve high school students in such settings, and determined the effectiveness of efforts to serve such purposes.

PROCEDURES

The counselors and many of the future teachers participated in weekly seminars devoted to study of the general problems associated with school suspensions and the specific problems of suspended students; became familiar

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with employment and educational opportunities for urban youth; got acquainted with disciplinary and other practices in real school situations and discussed them with teachers and parents; critiqued counseling interviews; developed case materials; observed demonstrations of effective techniques; evaluated their own efforts at counseling and tutoring; participated in the making of a documentary film about work with suspended students; learned about methods of compiling and processing data and became familiar with many housekeeping activities which are required of workers in urban high schools. The actual work with the suspended students and their parents and teachers is described in the body of the report.

The effectiveness of the work was determined primarily by comparing the overt behavior, verbal reactions, and attitudes toward the future of 103 counseled (project) and 119 non-counseled (control) students. The two groups were essentially similar and, for the purposes of this study, can be considered comparable. Reaction of the students' teachers and parents were obtained and counselors' appraisal of the project were recorded. More than one hundred tables of statistics and voluminous verbal reports were made available for examination by the writer.

RESULTS

The data reveal that significantly fewer of the counseled students dropped out of school, and more of them went to continuation schools. There were no significant differences in number of suspensions after association with the project, but a study of the reasons for suspensions revealed that significantly fewer project than control students were suspended for disobedience. The grade point averages of members of both project and control groups decreased as the school year advanced, but

those of the project group declined significantly less than those of the control group.

Inventory and interview data on students' perceptions of personal attributes, actions of others toward them, and their ideas about the future revealed few major differences. In some 400 item-by-item comparisons only fifteen showed significant differences and interpretation of them is equivocal.

When the counseled subjects were asked to indicate the relative value of the procedures employed, 75 percent mentioned individual counseling, 57 percent group counseling, 40 percent visiting university classes, and 34 percent academic assistance. Other activities were considered valuable by less than one third of the project students.

Teachers' descriptions of the students obtained approximately two months after the students' association with the project indicated that they observed a greater tendency of counseled subjects to get their work done, but saw no important differences in other classroom behavior and absenteeism. A check of official records on discipline, truancy and tardiness verified the teachers' statements.

The staff psychologist visited the homes of suspended students, assisted parents to understand and solve problems bearing on their children's behavior, served as a resource person for information and referral to community agencies, and contributed to the professional education of project counselors by bringing significant data about the homes to counselors for discussion.

All eleven counselors reported that they had profited from their participation in the project. They indicated in their reports (and the directors of the study who had observed them throughout agreed) and they were

well prepared to undertake counseling in urban community settings.

It appears that objective (verifiable) data do indicate some significant differences between the project and control groups, but that the interview and inventory data reveal few important differences. The results suggest that schools should make counseling related activities a basic part of their procedures in the treatment of suspended students if they continue to use suspension as a common school practice.